



## **AFSO21 views you can use...**

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Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century -- is it just one of those new catch-phrases or current buzzwords? I used to think so. I know that it sounds shocking coming from a senior NCO, but after almost 24 years of service and the "baggage" of being shell-shocked from total quality management, I honestly thought that AFSO21 was just another fad, and it wouldn't be taken seriously from anyone at any leadership level. I'm here to tell you that AFSO21 works.

It's not always immediately apparent, and the training is somewhat painful, however, when you execute LEAN principles on a process, you'd be truly amazed at all the flaws and wasted time you identified in said process. For example, as the process owner for technical order distribution for the 319th Operations Group aircrew members, we recently transitioned to partial e-publications and single publications kits for in-flight aircrew use versus individually issued publications.

We also recently suffered through a large round of T.O. changes, supplements and corrected pages for almost every T.O. required. Add to that, we implemented a new aerial refueling manual. This was the first large-scale test we'd undergone with our new pubs process. Needless to say, we struggled through it, and via in-depth and vital feedback from our customers and from our safety folks (because the kit weighed 70 pounds), it was determined that we needed to put AFSO21 and LEAN principles to the test!

As a skeptic of the program, I thought we were in for the 'standard' three-day TQM Tiger Team type event. I couldn't have been more wrong! Through effective start-up training provided by Maj. Pat Day, 319th Air Refueling Wing AFSO21 office, and his team, our eight team members tackled this daunting task through a four-day rapid improvement event.

The first steps involved team dynamics, removing barriers to ideas and communications, and understanding that everyone's viewpoint is valuable.

We mapped out our current state, or how our process works now, and identified that, from start-to-finish, our process had immense waste (time and manpower). LEAN brings a processes' "skeletons out-of-the-closet," and it is absolutely phenomenal to sit back and view where the break downs are and how much waste is present in what we do.

Next, we mapped out our ideal state, or how (if we could make anything happen) our process would work with no waste and add value for our customers.

Now a word of caution... regulatory guidance drives a great deal of what we do in the Air Force, so some waste will be present, unless regulatory guidance changes. The next step was to brainstorm ideas on how to get from the current to the ideal state.

Team dynamics really played a key role in brainstorming ideas. As an "old head" I will honestly admit it was difficult to accept input from a brand new second lieutenant on a process that I grew up on since the days of Strategic Air Command! However, these young folks have outstanding ideas and think of things that someone of my era would not normally think about.

Some of our action items and training items were the results of fantastic ideas from great young Air Force team members. We categorized all of our ideas into groupings of what impact they would have and whether it would be easy or hard to implement. From all of that, we formed and mapped out our future state and how we would get there. This is the part of the entire process where you figure out what you can implement in the short term (30 days) and what you can implement on the longer term (120 days or more), and find out if you've improved your process or eliminated waste.

Our results? Out of the two major goals set forth in our charter, we reduced the size and weight of our publications kits from 70 pounds to approximately 15 pounds (eliminating the safety issue) and moved toward a more flexible e-Pubs footprint, with the ultimate goal of going completely paperless in the future.

We also set achievable training times for aircrew members and measurable goals for our team so that we can continually improve our process over time, which is the cornerstone of AFSO21... continuous improvement. I am no longer a skeptic of this program. LEAN principles work! Pride in ownership of a process increases as a direct result and best of all you have a direct impact on processes that you use every day!

It is an excellent example of empowerment to identify waste and make beneficial changes. What do you get out of it? Time. Time to work smarter, time to focus on your primary mission, or something as simple as working effectively so you have more time off for yourself!

AFSO21 and LEAN -- they are not just buzzwords. After participating in our RIE, I'm convinced that it works. It is a fantastic way to get involved, take pride and ownership in your processes and effect change. What is extra time in your day worth to you? How would you like to work more efficiently? Well, the answer is right in front of you, and it's called... AFSO21. I'm sold, and you should be too!